DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 262 715 HE 018 793

AUTHOR Harris, Harold J., Jr.; Anttonen, Ralph G.
TITLE The Importance of Assessing Needs of Male and Female College Freshmen.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Freshmen; Females; Higher Education; Institutional Research; Males; *Needs Assessment; Questionnaires; *Sex Differences; State Universities; *Student Adjustment; Student College Relationship; *Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Incoming students' needs at a medium-sized, state university were assessed using a needs inventory, which was adapted from an instrument used at Pennsylvania State University, SNAPS (Student Needs at Penn State). The random sample of 356 incoming freshmen participating in the 1982 summer orientation program consisted of 135 males and 221 females, or about 25 percent of the new freshmen. Responses to the 70 force choice items of the inventory revealed that: there were major differences between the needs of males and females; females had higher needs in the personal and emotional areas; and students did not agree with staff perception of problems (i.e., drugs, alcohol, and discrimination). Female freshmen expressed higher needs concerning: college adjustment, academic advising, course selection, adequacy of library facilities, and student involvement with campus activities and staff. Both sexes rated as needs the areas of: academic skills needed in the classroom, self-image, physical and mental well-being, financial concerns, and knowledge of campus facilities. (SW)

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSING NEEDS OF MALE AND FEMALE COLLEGE FRESHMEN

Harold J. Harris, Jr., Ph.D., Counseling Psychologist,
Millersville University

Ralph G. Anttonen, Ph.D., Director of Educational Research,
Millersville University

*The authors present the results of a needs assessment survey of incoming freshmen at a medium-sized state-owned university. Sex differences are highlighted.*

Recent research has highlighted the concern for student retention and attrition at many institutions of higher education. (Lenning, Beal, Sauer, 1980). This concern has led to major institutional self-study of the factors which affect the "staying power" of students. In particular, Penn State University did an extensive analysis of student attrition at its main campus and published the findings in an in-house 1979 document, "An Analysis of Student Attrition at Penn State." One of the recommendations of their research was that data be gathered on a longitudinal basis for a variety of variables. In addition, the work also stressed the importance of student needs. As a result, Upcraft, Peterson and Moore, (1980), developed a paper and pencil instrument, SNAPS (Student Needs At Penn State). This instrument attempted to assess the future needs of entering Penn State freshmen.

A 1982 article by Mayes and McConatha stressed the importance of surveying student needs because of the changes in today's incoming college age population. They state, "These shifts in major problem areas require that institutions review and revise their services to meet the changing needs of the student population" (p. 476). In a similar vein, Kuh, (1982), calls for major efforts to upgrade the procedures and instruments involved with needs assessment. Kuh states that "creativity, hard work and common sense have been under-emphasized

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.....; yet, these qualities are crucial to generating the kind of information student affairs staffs require to meet student needs" (p. 208). Other significant articles dealing with student needs were recently conducted by Beard, Elmore and Lange, 1982; Gurtman, 1981; Hageseth, 1981; and Walker, 1980.

The present article presents a description of how an institution, building upon the Penn State model, developed and utilized its own student needs inventory tailored to fit the clientele of a medium-sized, state-owned, four-year institution of higher learning. It was felt that this instrument would aid the university in studying incoming student needs and making appropriate program changes. The following sections present a description of the methodology, the results of the data analysis and conclusions.

## Methodology

### Description of Instrument

In order to assess student needs at the University, an instrument, entitled, Millersville Assessment Program (MAP), was developed by Dr. Harold Harris, a counseling psychologist in the Student Affairs Center for Counseling and Human Development. This instrument was adapted from SNAPS and tailored to measure the needs of the University's population. Basically all items on the SNAPS inventory were given to four professionals who met directly with undergraduates on a continual basis. These individuals were asked to evaluate the appropriateness of each question in SNAPS and determine which items they felt could elicit valid responses from the students. Only those items which were judged appropriate by all four professionals were considered for possible inclusion in the final instrument. The list of agreed upon items was then examined by Dr. Harris for clarity, redundancy and

length of questionnaire. Based upon this examination and reworking, the final form of MAP consisting of 70 questions was developed during the academic year 1981-1982 (see Figure 1). Each question asked the student to rate on a 5-point scale the level of need ranging from major to does not apply.

## Sample

The instrument was administered to a random sample of 356 incoming freshmen during the university's 1982 Summer Orientation Program. Participants consisted of 135 males and 221 females and constituted approximately 25 percent of the entire incoming freshmen class.

## Procedure

During the two-day Freshmen Orientation Program there was a scheduled period of time for institutional and placement testing. The students who attended the orientation program were divided into groups of 15 to 20 freshmen led by a guide, an upperclassman who was selected, trained and paid by the university for their services. On the evening of the first day, the scheduled testing period, the sample was administered MAP. The testing material was collected from each group and delivered by the guides to the Counseling Center the following morning. At the end of the Orientation Program all tests were checked for completeness and appropriate requested information. The answer sheets were then sent to the University Computer Center for scoring and statistical evaluation.

FIGURE I

*The purpose of MAP is to determine the needs of Millersville University students. Student needs are of utmost importance to all levels of the college. MAP is an attempt to identify these needs so that the college may study and implement the appropriate program changes.*

Please respond to the following questions by marking one of the five choices on your answer sheet:

A. Major Need

B. Moderate Need

C. Minor Need

D. Not a Need

E. Does Not Apply

1. Establishing independence from parents
2. Formulating a personal value system
3. Coping with homesickness
4. Developing new friendships
5. Adjusting to a roommate
6. Maintaining a positive self-image
7. Learning to budget time
8. Feeling comfortable with personal appearance
9. Dealing with feelings and emotions
10. Coping with failure
11. Asserting oneself
12. Comprehending and handling stress
13. Dealing with depression
14. Having someone to talk with when upset
15. Clarifying one's identity
16. Coping with loneliness and/or isolation
17. Deciding about the use of alcohol
18. Deciding about the use of drugs
19. Living at MSC without fear of sexual harassment

20. Living at MSC without fear of racial discrimination
21. Adjusting to living in a residence hall
22. Finding professional help with personal problems
23. Feeling comfortable with meeting new people
24. Getting professional help with decision making
25. Identifying sexual needs
26. Making decisions about sexual preferences
27. Applying moral values to sexual needs
28. Determining religious beliefs
29. Having knowledge about campus facilities
30. Having a place to park one's car on campus
31. Having medical treatment facilities on campus
32. Having professional counseling facilities on campus
33. Finding cultural opportunities on campus
34. Finding materials in the library
35. Having a convenient class schedule
36. Choosing a major
37. Scheduling the courses needed
38. Receiving effective academic advising
39. Having good professors for classes
40. Having student-faculty discussion during class
41. Learning appropriate test taking skills
42. Developing note taking skills
43. Improving reading skills
44. Learning how to study
45. Having flexibility in choosing elective courses

46. Knowing about degree requirements for major
47. Receiving help from instructors outside of class
48. Finding a good place to study
49. Receiving information about tutorial services
50. Getting nutritious and well-balanced meals
51. Worrying about weight loss/gain
52. Finding transportation to and from MSC
53. Feeling safe on campus
54. Feeling safe in the borough of Millersville
55. Developing job search strategies and skills
56. Receiving career development counseling
57. Securing a job after graduation
58. Being admitted to a professional school (law, medicine) after graduation
59. Being admitted to graduate school after graduation
60. Choosing a career
61. Learning about job possibilities
62. Being involved in regular physical activities
63. Participating in student organizations
64. Having information about financial aid alternatives
65. Getting a part-time job
66. Having enough money
67. Knowing what is expected of a student
68. Establishing and maintaining self-motivation
69. Living at MSC without fear of sex discrimination
70. Having faculty and staff who are sensitive to student's needs.

## Data Analysis

In order to analyze the results of the M.A.P. questionnaire and since the study was exploratory a chi square statistic was deemed appropriate. This chi square involved the five (5) categories of the response choices and the two (2) sexes. 70 chi squares were calculated, one for each item.

In discussing the results, if a majority (i.e., 50% or more) of the students felt that a need was major or moderate it was classified as a student need. Likewise, if a majority of the students (i.e., 50% or more) felt that a need was minor or not a need then it was classified as a low need. The results of the 5 X 2 chi square are given in the next section.

## Results

As outlined in the previous Data Analysis section chi square tests of significance (5 X 2) were performed utilizing the 5 force choice responses of M.A.P. and the two levels of sex. Table 1 gives a summary of the $X^2$ values and the significance levels for each of the 70 items. Based on this table, a summary chart was prepared (see Figure 2). Basically, this figure groups items into statistically significant and non-significant categories. Furthermore, under this dichotomy items are arranged in terms of level of need for males and females.

As Figure 2 shows item numbers 1, 4, 6, 34, 37, 38, 45, 46, 57, 61, 63 and 70 all fell into the classification of need for both female and male with a significant difference between the two sexes. In all cases the need was higher for females. Items 1, 4 and 6 dealt with adjusting to the college environment. Items 34, 37, 38, 45 and 46 involved academic advisement, course selection and adequate library facilities. Items 57 and 61 dealt with vocational choice and items 63 and 70 were in the area of student involvement with campus activities and staff.

TABLE I

Summary of $X^2$ Statistics (Value and Level of Significance) for Each of the 70 Items of M.A.P.

| ITEM # | $X^2$ | Level of Significance |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | 16.55 | .002 * |
| 2. | 9.15 | .057 |
| 3. | 16.70 | .002 * |
| 4. | 7.90 | .050 |
| 5. | 3.77 | .440 |
| 6. | 17.87 | .001 * |
| 7. | 4.01 | .400 |
| 8. | 15.25 | .004 * |
| 9. | 21.02 | .0003 * |
| 10. | 14.58 | .006 * |
| 11. | 3.97 | .410 |
| 12. | 16.06 | .003 * |
| 13. | 11.27 | .020 * |
| 14. | 14.79 | .005 * |
| 15. | 10.39 | .03 * |
| 16. | 12.27 | .015 * |
| 17. | 2.26 | .69 |
| 18. | .89 | .93 |
| 19. | 27.15 | .0000 |
| 20. | .58 | .97 |
| 21. | 5.75 | .22 |
| 22. | 12.23 | .015 |
| 23. | 4.30 | .37 |
| 24. | 4.87 | .30 |
| 25. | 19.75 | .006 |

| ITEM # | $\chi^2$ | Level of Significance |
|---|---|---|
| 26. | 6.09 | .19 |
| 27. | 8.75 | .07 |
| 28. | 10.22 | .04 |
| 29. | 4.80 | .31 |
| 30. | 7.69 | .10 |
| 31. | 1.71 | .79 |
| 32. | 5.08 | .28 |
| 33. | 2.53 | .64 |
| 34. | 13.88 | .001 |
| 35. | 4.77 | .31 |
| 36. | 4.74 | .32 |
| 37. | 15.99 | .003 |
| 38. | 13.02 | .011 |
| 39. | 6.95 | .14 |
| 40. | 8.49 | .08 |
| 41. | 5.74 | .22 |
| 42. | 3.40 | .49 |
| 43. | 5.28 | .26 |
| 44. | 1.32 | .86 |
| 45. | 12.53 | .013 |
| 46. | 12.78 | .012 |
| 47. | 3.22 | .52 |
| 48. | 2.75 | .60 |
| 49. | 7.32 | .119 |
| 50. | 8.19 | .08 |

| ITEM # | $x^2$ | Level of Significance |
|---|---|---|
| 51. | 48.02 | .00000 |
| 52. | 17.57 | .002 |
| 53. | 47.96 | .0000 |
| 54. | 38.05 | .0000 |
| 55. | 9.21 | .06 |
| 56. | 8.32 | .08 |
| 57. | 12.45 | .014 |
| 58. | 1.03 | .91 |
| 59. | 8.23 | .08 |
| 60. | 3.56 | .47 |
| 61. | 14.18 | .007 |
| 62. | .75 | .94 |
| 63. | 22.66 | .0001 |
| 64. | 3.68 | .45 |
| 65. | 2.18 | .70 |
| 66. | 5.70 | .22 |
| 67. | 3.84 | .43 |
| 68. | 5.00 | .29 |
| 69. | 40.81 | .00001 |
| 70. | 10.25 | .04 |

FIGURE 2

Summary of 70 MAP Items Classified into Statistically Significant or Non-Significant and Level of Need for Male and Female

| | Significant | Non-Significant |
|---|---|---|
| Need for Both Male and Female | 1, 4, 6, 34, 37, 38, 45, 46, 57, 61, 63 and 70 | 2, 7, 11, 23, 29, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 50, 55, 56, 60, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67 and 68 |
| Need for Female Low Need for Male | 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 51 and 53 | 5 |
| Need for Male Low Need for Female | | |
| Low Need for Both Male and Female | 3, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 52, 54 and 69 | 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 49, 58 and 59 |

In Figure 2 items number 2, 7, 11, 23, 29, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 50, 55, 56, 60, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67 and 68 were all need items for both sexes but with no significant difference between males and females. Items number 7, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47 and 48 were all in the area of academic skills needed in the classroom. Items 2, 11, 23, 50, 62 and 68 all dealt with the areas of self-image and one's physical and mental well-being. Items 55, 56 and 60 revealed a need for career decision-making. Items 64, 65 and 66 involved the financial concerns of the student. Item 29 expressed a concern for knowledge of campus facilities and item 67 showed a need to know what is expected of a student.

As Figure 2 shows items 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 51 and 53 fell into the catagory of significant difference between male and female with a need for females but a low need for the males. These items dealt with one's self-image, physical and emotional states, and safety.

Figure 2 also shows that one item, item 5, dealing with roommate adjustment was not statistically significant.

Figure 2 further shows that items 3, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 52, 54 and 69 all fell into the classification of low need with significant differences between sexes. In all cases males expressed a lower need than females. Items number 3, 13, 16, 22 and 25 all dealt with personal and emotional problems. Items number 19 and 69 involved the area of sexual discrimination. Item 28 dealt with religious beliefs. Item 52 involved transportational needs and item 54 involved safety in the campus town.

Finally, Figure 2 shows that items 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 49, 58 and 59 were classified as low need with no significant difference between the sexes. Items 17, 18 and 20 dealt with major issues on every college campus, i.e., alcohol, drugs and racial discrimination. Items 21, 24, 26 and 27 all involve maturational adjustment and decision-making. Items 30, 31, 32, 33 and 49 all related to the physical plant and services in the college setting and items 58 and 59 dealt with education beyond the bachelors.

## Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to both build and utilize an instrument for determining the needs of college freshmen. A survey consisting of 70 force choice items was administered to a random sample of 356 incoming freshmen at a medium-sized, state-owned, four-year institution of higher learning. The data was analyzed via a chi square statistics with response level and sex forming the two independent variables. Major results showed that

1) There are major differences between the needs of males and females.
2) Females had higher needs in the personal and emotional areas.
3) In areas where males and females had a need, in all cases the females had a higher need than the males.
4) In low need areas the needs of the female were also higher.
5) Major problems (i.e., drugs, alcohol and discrimination) perceived as important by university staff were not seen as a need by the students.

It is apparent from the results of the present study that the needs of male and female students differ. Any institution should be cognizant of this difference. Futhermore, all institutions are concerned about the importance of improving the retention of their students, especially with the nationally declining student pool, and one apparent area to place their emphasis would be to make programatic changes to better meet their student needs. It is also interesting to note that in areas that institutions see as needs, i.e., drugs, alcohol and discrimination, students deny. Thus, it is the responsibility of the institution to go beyond the expressed needs of students and provide the knowledge and the guidance that college-age students require for their educational and emotional development.

Obviously, although there are commonalities among institutions,

every college and university must conduct their own needs assessment so that the programatic changes will be appropriate to the indigenous needs of their students.

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